

STATE OF IOWA
PROPERTY ASSESSMENT APPEAL BOARD

Glen & Jan Ekeler,
Appellants,

v.

Union County Board of Review,
Appellee.

ORDER

Docket No. 13-88-0058
Parcel No. 06010-000-474-50

On December 19, 2013, the above-captioned appeal came on for consideration before the Iowa Property Assessment Appeal Board. The appeal was conducted under Iowa Code section 441.37A(2)(a-b) (2013) and Iowa Administrative Code rules 701-71.21(1) et al. The Appellants Glen and Jan Ekeler were self-represented and requested their appeal proceed without a hearing. County Attorney Timothy Kenyon represents the Board of Review. The Appeal Board now, having examined the entire record, and being fully advised, finds:

Findings of Fact

Glen and Jan Ekeler are the owners of property located at 2056 Ivy Avenue, Creston, Iowa. The real estate was classified residential on the January 1, 2013, assessment and valued at \$108,250, representing \$13,040 in land value and \$95,210 in dwelling value. The Ekelers are challenging the dwelling value only.

Ekelers protested the assessment to the Union County Board of Review on the grounds that the assessment was not equitable as compared with assessments of other like property in the under Iowa Code section 441.37(1)(a)(1) and that there was a change in value since the last assessment under sections 441.37(1)(b) and 441.35(3). Ekelers stated “See Attached” on the inequity ground, but did not list any comparable properties on the form. We note the certified record did not include any attachment to the petition regarding comparable properties. The Board of Review denied the protest.

Ekelers then appealed to this Board reasserting their claims. In a re-assessment year like 2013, a protest based on change in value is akin to a market value claim under section 441.37(1)(a)(2). *See Dedham Co-op. Ass'n v. Carroll County Bd. of Review*, 2006 WL 1750300 (Iowa Ct. App. 2006). Additionally, if Ekelers also intended to plead inequity in the assessment, we note an aggrieved taxpayer must list more than one comparable property on the protest form. *Montgomery Ward Dev. Corp. v. Cedar Rapids Bd. of Review*, 488 N.W.2d 436, 441 (Iowa 1992), *overruled on other grounds by Transform, Ltd. v. Assessor of Polk County*, 543 N.W.2d 614 (Iowa 1996). This “statutory requirement is both a jurisdictional prerequisite and an evidentiary requirement for bringing a claim of inequitable or discriminatory assessment before the board.” *Id.* Since it does not appear Ekelers listed any comparables on their protest form nor provided any to this Board, we will only consider their over-assessment claim.

According to the property record card, the subject property is a two-story dwelling built in 1900 and remodeled in 1980. The dwelling has 1728 square-feet of living area and a full basement with 575 square feet of finish. The property is also improved by an 896-square-foot detached garage built in 2001 and a shed built in 2010. The property is listed in above-normal condition with average quality grade (4+00). The dwelling sits on a 2.25 acre site.

Ekelers claim their property’s value has declined because of hog confinements being constructed in the vicinity of their Creston home. They report their property is located 0.777 miles northwest of one confined animal feeding operation (CAFO) and 1.888 miles north of another CAFO. In their opinion, the dwelling value should be reduced by \$39,655 to an assessment of \$55,555 based on report completed by Hans R. Isakson, Ph.D., Department of Economics, University of Northern Iowa. The report, “Estimation of the Impact of the Effect of Confined Animal Feeding Operations on the Assessed Value of Selected Houses in Union County, Iowa,” was completed May 14, 2013.

The report bases its conclusion on a previous analysis conducted by Isakson and Mark D. Ecker, Department of Mathematics, University of Northern Iowa titled, “An analysis of the impact of Swine CAFOs on the value of nearby houses.” 39 AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS 365-372 (2008). In the original analysis, Isakson and Ecker identified CAFOs as locally undesirable land uses (LULU) because of concerns of unpleasant odors and ground water contamination. They conducted a study to evaluate the impact of swine CAFOs on arm’s-length, house sales in Black Hawk County, Iowa from January 2000 to November 2004. Isakson and Ecker used housing sales data and swine CAFO data incorporating variables measuring the number of animal units, the prevailing winds, and distance of the homes from the CAFOs. The variable “wind angle” measured the extent to which a house is downwind from a nearby CAFO in winter and/or summer months. Isakson and Ecker’s study found houses that are very close (within 3 miles) and directly downwind from a CAFO suffered large adverse impacts. In applying the study to the subject property and others similarly situated properties in Union County, Isakson noted the properties in question were all less than three miles from two different CAFOs, identified as the Taylor North and South Sites.

In estimating the adverse effect of the CAFOs, Isakson conceded he did not know the market value of the subject property or other properties in Creston; therefore, he adjusted their assessed values. Isakson noted the Union County sites were much larger than the properties in the Black Hawk County study. He specifically used only the assessed value of the properties’ improvements, excluding the assessed value of the land because he did not believe agricultural land would be impacted from an agricultural use. Isakson applied the wind angle variable (degree of prevailing wind x angle of the house from true north) from the primary study to the Union County properties. He calculated that the wind angle of Ekeler’s property was 85 degrees for the Taylor North Site and 63 degrees for the Taylor South site. Based on this he estimates a negative effect on Ekeler’s assessed improvement value of \$39,655 ($85 \text{ degrees} \times 0.49\% = 41.65\% \text{ value reduction}$).

Union County Assessor Gene Haner submitted a letter (Exhibit A) explaining the Board of Review's action. Haner reported the hog confinements in question were not constructed until after the January 1, 2013, assessment date. The confinement owner applied for a new address prior to construction of one of the CAFOs on March 28, 2013. As of April 2, 2013, there were no improvements other than a driveway. Further, Haner reported an open house was held on June 19, 2013, at one of the CAFOs and at that time, there were no hogs in the building. Therefore, the Board of Review concluded the CAFOs could not have had an adverse effect on the property value for the 2013 assessment. We agree.

In the certified record, Haner also provided two sales of properties located near hog confinements, presumably in an effort to demonstrate property values of homes near CAFOs had not declined. These sales occurred in 2004 and 2008 and the sale prices were significantly higher than the assessed values of the properties at the time of sale. While this information demonstrates a continued market for dwellings near confinements, it does not demonstrate the impact on value, if any, of their proximity to such facilities. For this reason, we give it no consideration.

Conclusion of Law

The Appeal Board applied the following law.

The Appeal Board has jurisdiction of this matter under Iowa Code sections 421.1A and 441.37A. This Board is an agency and the provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act apply. Iowa Code § 17A.2(1). This appeal is a contested case. § 441.37A(1)(b). The Appeal Board determines anew all questions arising before the Board of Review, but considers only those grounds presented to or considered by the Board of Review. §§ 441.37A(3)(a); 441.37A(1)(b). New or additional evidence may be introduced. *Id.* The Appeal Board considers the record as a whole and all

of the evidence regardless of who introduced it. § 441.37A(3)(a); *see also Hy-vee, Inc. v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 710 N.W.2d 1, 3 (Iowa 2005). There is no presumption the assessed value is correct.

§ 441.37A(3)(a). However, the taxpayer has the burden of proof. § 441.21(3). This burden may be shifted; but even if it is not, the taxpayer may still prevail based on a preponderance of the evidence. *Id.*; *Richards v. Hardin County Bd. of Review*, 393 N.W.2d 148, 151 (Iowa 1986).

In Iowa, property is to be valued at its actual value. Iowa Code § 441.21(1)(a). Actual value is the property's fair and reasonable market value. § 441.21(1)(b). Market value essentially is defined as the value established in an arm's-length sale of the property, or a "fair and reasonable exchange . . . between a willing buyer and a willing seller." *Id.* Sale prices of the property or comparable properties in normal transactions are to be considered in arriving at market value. *Id.* The property's assessed value shall be one hundred percent of its actual value. § 441.21(1)(a).

In an appeal alleging the property is assessed for more than the value authorized by law under Iowa Code section 441.37(1)(a)(2), the taxpayer must show: 1) the assessment is excessive and 2) the subject property's correct value. *Boekeloo v. Bd. of Review of the City of Clinton*, 529 N.W.2d 275, 277 (Iowa 1995).

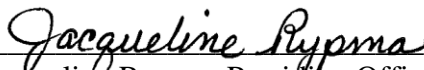
Ekelers submitted Isakson's analysis of the impact of nearby CAFOs on their property's value. While an interesting theoretic concept, Isakson's method is not based on an established and recognized approach to property valuation. While we recognize that close and downwind proximity to CAFOs may have a negative impact on property values, Isakson's predictions of estimated value loss are premature, at best, as neither of the CAFOs were operational as of the assessment date. Furthermore, the study lacks any indices of the properties' fair market values, such as an appraisal, comprehensive market analysis, current sales data, or paired sales analysis. And, the sales comparison approach is the preferred method to assess property under Iowa law. § 441.21(1)(b). Ultimately, we do not find

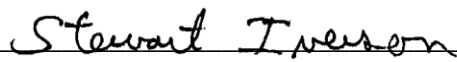
Isakson's method of estimating future decline in improvement values to be reasonable or supported by current, local market data.

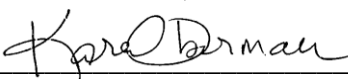
After consideration of the evidence, we find Ekelers failed to demonstrate the subject property's over assessed.

THE APPEAL BOARD ORDERS the January 1, 2013 assessment of the Board of Review is affirmed.

Dated this 7th day of February 2014.


Jacqueline Rypma, Presiding Officer


Stewart Iverson, Board Chair


Karen Oberman, Board Member

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